

SANITARY COMMISSION.

No. 58.

PROPOSED

SCHEME FOR THE RELIEF

OF

DISABLED SOLDIERS,

BY

JOHN ORDRONAU,

ASSOCIATE MEMBER.

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No. 58.

NEW YORK AGENCY,
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Dear Sir,—The Sanitary Commission, with an earnest solicitude for the welfare of that large body of disabled soldiers whom the accidents of war will precipitate as pensioners upon the country, and desirous of making the scheme for their relief commensurate with the varying necessities of every class of invalids, and of the least possible cost to the nation, have requested me to prepare a report upon the subject embodying such ideas, observations, and suggestions, as will tend to provoke investigation, disseminate information, and create a true public interest in the matter.

In order the better to fathom this intricate question, and to draw light from all possible sources, the Commission have secured the services of a distinguished sociologist, Mr. S. H. Perkins, now abroad, who has been engaged for some time in collecting the recorded experience and legislation of European countries upon this topic. From the results of his observations, and a careful scrutiny of the pension systems of the Old World, it seems evident that we shall learn mostly what to avoid, and find little to imitate in them. The ever-present respect for, and the perpetuated sanctions of, *caste-privilege*, which permeate the legislation of those countries, renders it quite certain that nothing of theirs can be adopted by us without having first passed through an alembic of American principles. As a question of the gravest importance in political economy, and requiring to be envisaged under the triple light of justice, humanity, and material cost, it is speaking within bounds to assert, that very little guidance is to be obtained from books alone, and that, consequently, the intelligent mind of the country must everywhere be subsidized in order to concentrate such an accumulation of wisdom upon the subject, as

will set at rest all doubts of the means, and aids to reflection and judgment, of which the Commission has availed itself in preparing their report.

In the belief that it would afford you pleasure to assist in so national and humanitarian a work as this, your attention is accordingly invited to the annexed syllabus of crude propositions, which it is hoped that you will carefully consider, criticise, and comment upon at your earliest convenience. And as these propositions are merely tentative, and designed to court investigation and evoke opinion, you will greatly oblige the Commission by expressing your views in the nature of a gloss, note, or comment upon any, each, or all of them, stating the grounds of your objections, if any—suggesting modifications, and contributing whatever else may strike you as calculated to illuminate the subject.

I have the honor to be,

Very respectfully yours,

JNO. ORDRONAU, X
Associate Member.

PROPOSED SCHEME OF RELIEF FOR MILITARY INVALIDS.

Proposition First.

There should be two classes of beneficiaries, viz. :

1st Class.

WOUNDED OR DISABLED SOLDIERS: *i. e.*, anatomically impaired in either the organs of sight, hearing, prehension, locomotion, &c., &c.

Of these there should be also two divisions, viz. :
WHOLLY, and
HALF, disabled.

2d Class.

INVALIDS OR VALETUDINARIANS: *i. e.*, serious impairment of functions tending to produce, or having already produced, organic lesions; *e. g.* phthisis, hypertrophy of spleen or liver, chronic diarrhœa tending to marasmus, &c., &c.

Of these there should be also two divisions, viz. :
WHOLLY, or *incurably*, and
HALF, or *temporarily*, invalided; *i. e.*, where prognosis of malady is uncertain.

Proposition Second.

The *disability*—of whatever name, nature, or degree—in order to entitle to a pension, should have arisen while in the execution of a *commanded duty*. Therefore, accidents resulting from drunken brawls, while off duty, or during furloughs, or desertions, or unpermitted absences, whether involving loss of limb or health, should not be considered as giving a right to a pension.

Proposition Third.

In the allotment of the pension the character and degree of the disability should take precedence of the question of rank. The object should be to remunerate or indemnify the *physical* man first, afterwards the *intellectual* man. This would not destroy the distinction between officers and privates, but measure the *pro rata* of pension of either class by the equitable scale of physical disability.

Proposition Fourth.

In the allotment of the pension the *actual primary* loss or constitutional enfeeblement of the man in parts or power, should form the measure of his claim to assistance, and nothing in the nature of *remote* or consequential losses should enter into the estimate.

Proposition Fifth.

Every measure tending to fuse invalids* into a class, with particular political privileges and immunities, should be discountenanced. Nor should any such accumulation of them be permitted as would render them, in any locality, independent of public opinion, or segregate them from friends, kindred, or fellow-citizens.

Proposition Sixth.

As far as possible, invalids should be restored to their original homes, and the communities to which they belong should re-absorb them, by assigning to them, by conventional agreement, the lighter occupations; and no provision separating them from their families or diminishing their domestic responsibilities should be encouraged. For, wherever invalids have homes, public opinion should encourage these as the best places for them; the object always being to keep them from ultimately drifting into town or county pauper asylums.

Proposition Seventh.

Could not a *Sedentary Corps* be established from invalids, and with which *forts* could be garrisoned? Many a man discharged as unfit for *active, field* duties, could be made very serviceable in a garrison, Government workshop, arsenal, or the like. Change of climate and locality would also enable many men invalidated at the South, to serve in Northern posts with comparatively good health. The Government might give the

* The term *invalid*, wherever else occurring, is intended to apply generically to both classes of military beneficiaries.

invalid his choice of receiving a pension, or entering the Sedentary Corps with regular, though diminished wages as compared with the field-soldier.

Proposition Eighth.

Could not a *National Invalid Corps*, be established, as recommended by Mr. Olmsted, the men of which should have preference given them in the minor offices—such as messengers, janitors, door-keepers, jailors, &c., or perform subordinate duties connected with the various Government offices, Courts, Post-offices, Custom-Houses, &c.?

Proposition Ninth.

National Military Homes or Asylums should be created, which should be semi-industrial. On entering them the invalid should relinquish his pension.

Proposition Tenth.

Could not the Public Lands enable us to form invalid Battalions, or districts of military agriculturalists throughout the great West? In the event of a Monarchy being re-established in Mexico, would it be advisable to organize a military frontier?

Proposition Eleventh.

In the construction and service of the Pacific Railroad, what parts could there be assigned to invalid soldiers, *e. g.*, overseers, switchmen, flagmen, telegraph operators, station and freight agents, clerks, conductors, engineers, firemen, &c.? How many such *employees* will that road require?

Proposition Twelfth.

Are *invalid villages* practicable, where the results of accumulated and combined labor shall be annually distributed among the families, according to the amount of work performed by their members.

Proposition Thirteenth.

Is the Prussian *versorgungsschein*—or privilege to fill vacancies occurring in subordinate government offices, on surrendering the pension already held—practicable with us? It being understood that if the incumbent is displaced from change of administration alone, he shall recover his pension.

Proposition Fourteenth.

The pension should be so small as not to allow the half-invalid to live in absolute idleness, be he officer or private. This would act as an incentive to every unimpaired power, and to every remaining degree of curtailed power to exert its best efforts for self-support and independence, as not a jot of support beyond what is strictly necessary can be bestowed without demoralizing the recipient.

Proposition Fifteenth.

The pensions of valetudinarians should be *temporary*, and renewable annually, upon proper medical certificate of continuous disability.

Proposition Sixteenth.

Some method of obtaining and receiving pensions with the least possible delay, and smallest expense, should be established by law.

Proposition Seventeenth.

The wife or widow, in order to claim her husband's pension, must show that marriage occurred anterior to wounding or invalidism.

Proposition Eighteenth.

The retired list. How shall it be pensioned; and after what length of service?